The Old Witch Gets a Surprise

by Ida DeLage

illustrated by Ellen Sloan

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The Old Witch Gets a Surprise

The old witch of the hill
came out of her cave.
She peeked into
her pumpkin mailbox.

"Oh, ho!" cried the old witch.
"A letter for me!
I wonder who wrote to me.
It isn't my birthday,"
said the witch.
"Maybe someone is inviting me
to a Halloween party."

The witch opened her letter.
She read:

Dear Witch,
Come to my house.
I have a big surprise
to show you.
From,
The Wizard.

"Well, well," said the witch,
"a surprise!
I wonder what it is.
Maybe the wizard has a new cat."
The old witch put on her hat.
She took her magic broom.

The witch flew off
down the hill.
On she flew until she came
to the great blue rock.
On top of the rock
was a castle with five towers.

The wizard was at the gate.
He was waving his arms.
"Come in, old witch," he said.
"I have been waiting for you."
"Hello there, old wizard,"
said the witch.

"I can't wait
to see your surprise."
"Ha!" said the wizard.
"You will be so surprised,
your eyes will pop out.
Just follow me, old witch."

The old witch and the wizard
went through the castle gate.
"There!" cried the wizard.
"What do you think of that?"
The old witch's eyes
almost popped out of her head.
In the middle
of the castle courtyard
was a great big balloon!
A dragon was painted
on the balloon.
It spit fire at its own tail.
Under the dragon balloon
was a big basket.

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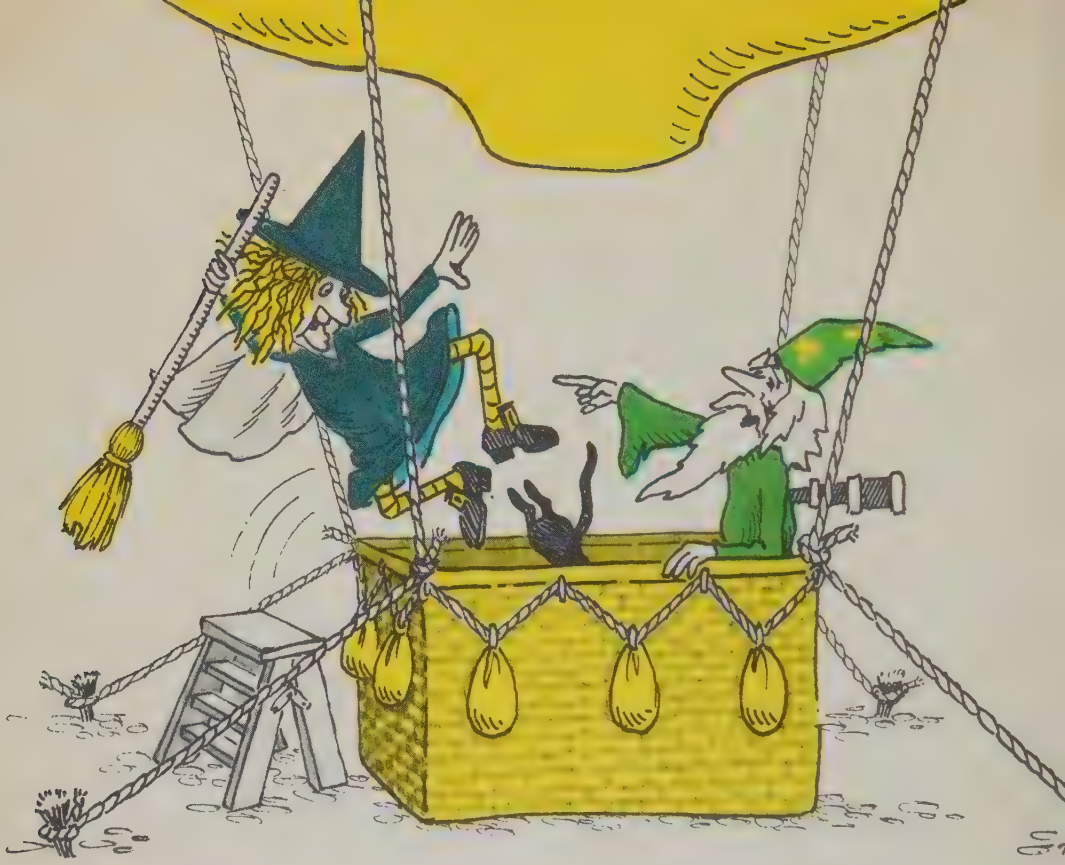
"Ho!" cried the witch.
"I never saw such a thing
in my life!
Where did you get that,
old wizard?"

"I made it myself,"
said the wizard.
"Isn't it wonderful?
This balloon can fly.
It can fly better than your broom.
Come on, old witch.
I'll take you for a ride."



The old witch hopped up
into the basket of the balloon.
"Old witch," said the wizard,
"you won't need
your old broom now."

The old witch knew
that the wizard was very smart.
That's why he was called
the Great Wizard of Blue Rock.
He was always making things.
But the witch also knew
that some things he made
did not work.
When the wizard wasn't looking,
the old witch hid her broom
under her cloak.
"Old wizard," she said,
"if this balloon can fly,
let's go!"

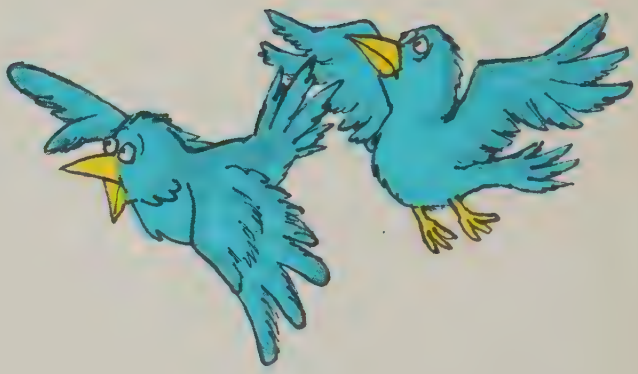
"First," said the wizard,
"I have to make the fire hot."
In the middle of the basket,
a fire was glowing
in a little firebox.
The wizard made the fire
hotter and hotter.
Hot smoke and hot air
went up into the balloon.
The balloon got bigger and bigger.

The wizard untied the ropes
that held the balloon
on the ground.
"Hold on, old witch,"
shouted the wizard.
"Here we go!"

The dragon balloon
went up into the air.
Up it went
over the five towers,
up, up into the sky!
The old witch held on.
So did the wizard.

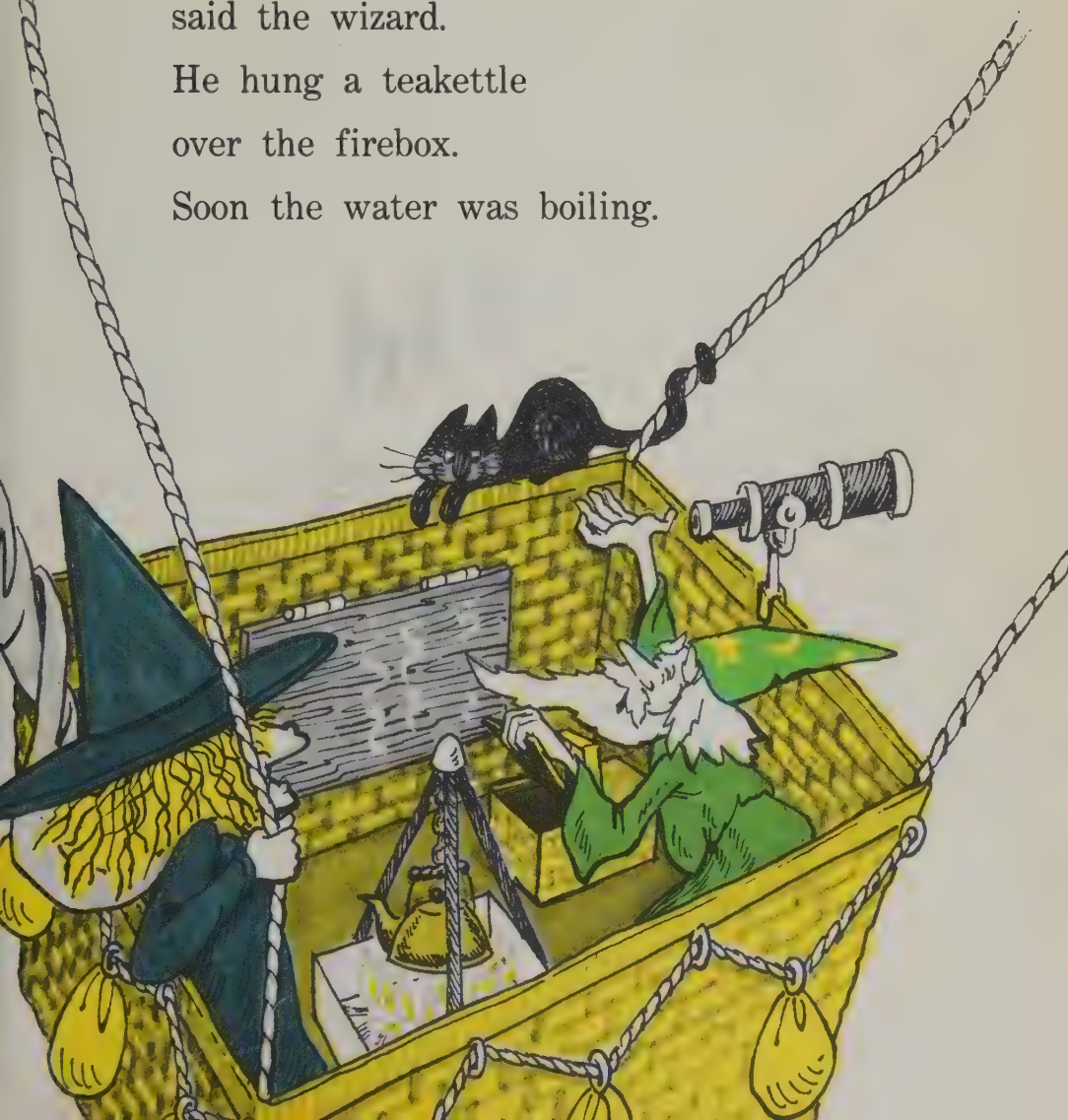
"Look!" cried the wizard.
"How high we are!
See my castle.
It looks like a little toy castle."

"Isn't it wonderful to fly?"
asked the wizard.
"Yes," said the witch politely.
But the witch wasn't excited.
She flew on her magic broom
every day.

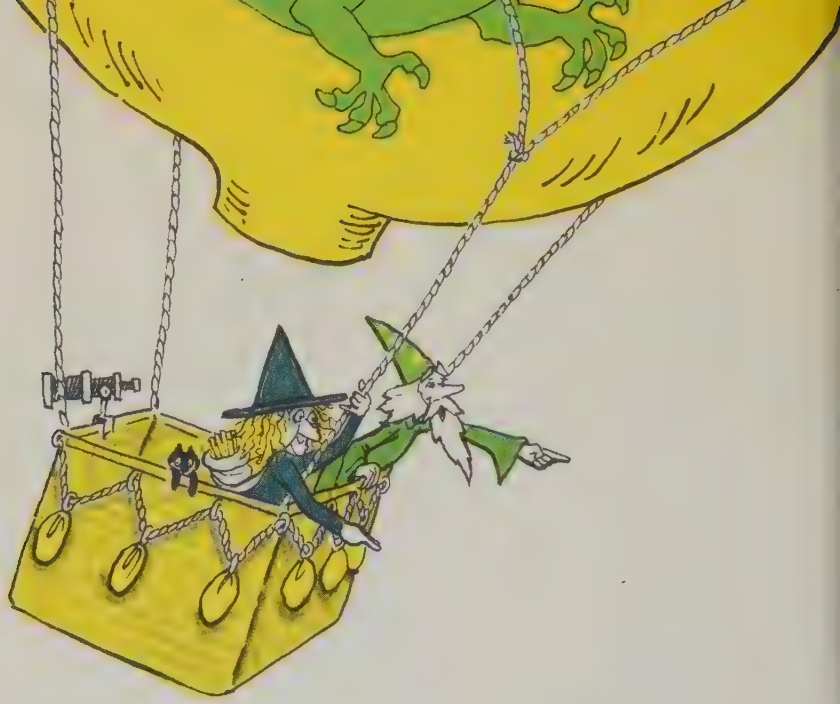


The big balloon sailed on
in the blue sky.
Some birds came flying by.
"What is that funny thing?"
they chirped.
"It can fly,
but it has no wings!"

"I have another surprise
for you, old witch,"
said the wizard.
He hung a teakettle
over the firebox.
Soon the water was boiling.

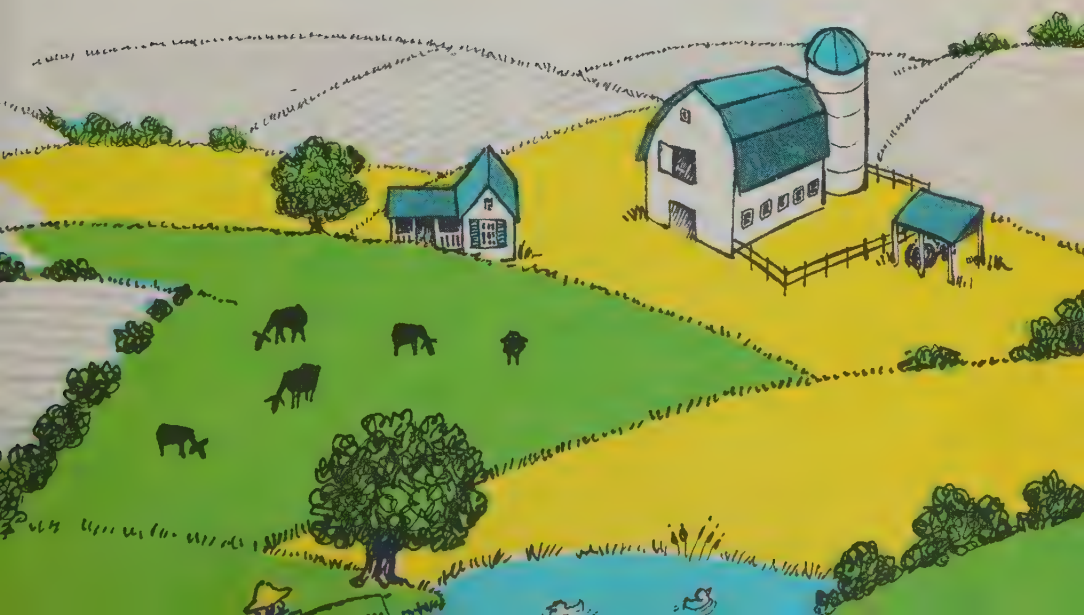


The wizard set a little table.
He poured some tea.
"Have a cookie, old witch,"
he said.
"Thank you," said the witch.
"Isn't it nice," said the wizard,
"to have a tea party in the sky?
You can't have a tea party
on your broom,
can you, old witch?"
"Well," said the witch,
"I never tried."



The wind blew the balloon
on and on.
"See there," said the wizard.
"It's the old farmer's barn.
And there are his cows.
They look like little mice.

Can you see the duck pond?
It looks like a little puddle."
"I see the old farmer,"
said the witch.
"Tee-hee-hee!
He looks as little as a bug.
Do you think we are up too high,
old wizard?"



The witch looked up.
"Ho!" she said.
"Look at those black clouds!
A big storm is coming.
Come on, old wizard.
Steer this balloon
back to your castle."
"Oh, oh!" said the wizard.
"I have something to tell you,
old witch.
Only the wind
can steer a balloon."
Just then,
the wind started to blow hard.

The wind made the basket
swing this way
and that way.
Lightning lit up the sky.
Thunder went BOOM!
The black clouds poured rain
on the witch and the wizard.

Rain fell into the firebox.
The hot coals smoked and steamed.
The balloon began
to get smaller.
It began to drop.
Faster and faster it went down.

The witch and the wizard
hugged each other.
"Do something, old wizard,"
cried the witch.
"I can't," yelled the wizard.

The witch grabbed her broom
from under her cloak.
"Well," she shouted,
"if you can't, I CAN!
Come on, old wizard.
Hop on my broom with me."

The wizard hopped on the broom
with the old witch. SWISH!
The magic broom flew off.
Through the rain and wind
it flew.
The old witch steered it
straight to her cave.

The old farmer was down
at the duck pond.
"I can't fish any more today,"
he said.
"A big storm is coming."
He looked up at the sky.

At that very moment,
the balloon and basket
fell into the duck pond!
PLOP!
The firebox hissed out
a big puff of steam.
A clap of thunder went BOOM!

"Jumping bullfrogs!"
yelled the farmer.
"A dragon!"
He ran home so fast,
he forgot his fishing pole,
his can of worms,
and his fish.

The farmer's wife
was taking the clothes
off the clothesline.
"Never mind the clothes, Ma,"
yelled the farmer.
"Get in the house.
A dragon is on the duck pond!"

The farmer and his wife
peeked out the window.
"Are you sure, Pa," asked Ma,
"that you saw a dragon?"
"Oh, yes," said Pa.
"I saw a dragon.
I heard him roar.
I felt his steam."

When the storm was over,
Ma and Pa went to the duck pond.
They hid behind a tree
and looked and looked.
But they didn't see a dragon.
Where did the dragon go?
Only the ducks knew.

Inside the witch's cave,
the wet old wizard sneezed,
"Kerchoo! Kerchoo!"
"Don't worry, old wizard,"
said the witch.
"You will be fine in a minute.
I will stir up the fire
and give you a bowl
of my special, magic brew."
The wizard's eyes lit up.
At last!
Now he could see
how the old witch made
her wonderful, magic brew!

"Aren't you lucky!"
said the smart old witch.
"I made some new brew
this morning.
All I have to do
is to warm it up."
"Hmph!" said the wizard.

The witch filled his bowl
four times.
"Now I feel fine,"
said the happy wizard.
"Good," said the witch.
"Hop on my broom with me.
I will take you home
to your castle."

The wizard waved good-bye.
"Good-bye, old witch.
Now I will make something
better than a balloon."
"Old wizard," called the witch,
"make sure you can steer it."

One day, the witch
looked out of her cave.
There was the wizard!
"Surprise, old witch!"
yelled the wizard.
"You will never need
your old broom again!"

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